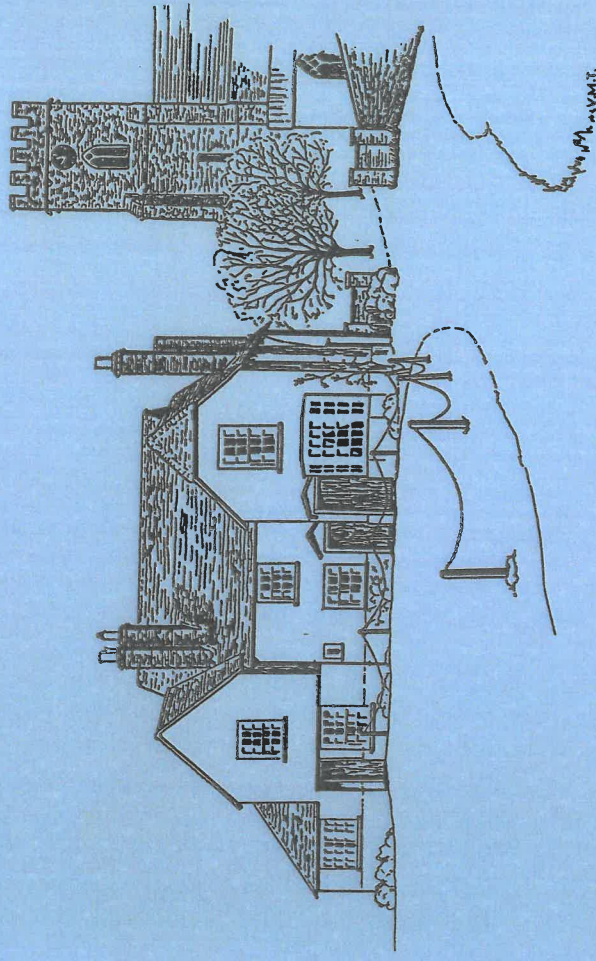


Chipping Hill

Past and Present



Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to introduce the reader to the old buildings of Chipping Hill, and through them to recount a little bit of the history of the village. It is hoped that the guide will encourage the reader to become more aware of old buildings, and perhaps to observe them more closely.

Due to its past history, and lack of development during the eighteenth century, Chipping Hill has a wealth of timber framed buildings, some over six hundred years old. Over the years many will have been altered and their true age may not always be obvious.

The guide takes the form of a tour around Chipping Hill, starting and finishing at the railway station, and following the route shown on the centre pages, 24 and 25.

C Taylor. 1993.

Chipping Hill

Historical Introduction

Chipping Hill was the original town of Witham, long before the present Witham, centred on Newland Street, came into existence.

The town's first known settlement was an iron-age fort or earth work, which, two-and-a-half thousand years ago, occupied a site centred roughly on where the railway station now is. It consisted of a circular ditch and rampart some five hundred feet in diameter on top of a mound.

Although it is known that there were Roman settlements to the north and south of Chipping Hill, no Roman remains of any significance have been found here. The only evidence of any Roman buildings is the Roman bricks and tiles used in building the church, however this could be misleading as these materials could have been brought from other sites.

After the Saxon invasion in the fifth century it seems likely that they established a centre here, and then in the seventh century St. Cedds missionaries came and established a Christian community.

The first reference to the name "Witham" appears in an Anglo-Saxon chronicle of AD.913, when the Saxon King, Edward the Elder, built a "burh", or fortified mound, surrounding the older iron-age fort as a defence against the Danish invaders. Witham became the meeting place for the Court of the Saxon "Hundred", and the village developed outside the fortified mound.

After the Norman conquest, the old village of Witham became a Royal manor and an important centre for trade. The manor was granted to Eustace, Count of Boulogne, and descended to his daughter Matilda, who became Queen to King Stephen.

In the year 1119, the Order of the Knights Templar was established, an aristocratic order of chivalry, sometimes described as "Monks in Armour". King Stephen was an enthusiastic supporter of the Order and, in 1147, granted the manor of Witham to them. The income from the manor was to help finance their operations in the Holy Lands.

In about the year 1210, the Knights Templar founded a market on the main London to Norwich road, which passed nearby, to take advantage of the passing trade. They called it the "New Land", later to become Newland Street, and the Witham as we now know it was born.

By the beginning of the fourteenth century the Knights Templar had become too rich and powerful, and in 1312 they were suppressed by order of the Pope. The manor of Witham was then transferred to their rivals, the Knights Hospitaller.

As Newland Street grew in importance it took over the name of "Witham" and the old Saxon village became known as Chipping Hill; the name "Chipping" being derived from the Saxon word for a market. The two communities continued to thrive side-by-side and markets continued to be held in Chipping Hill until the fifteenth century. Annual fairs were still held until the nineteenth century.

During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Witham enjoyed a period of great prosperity. This was due largely to the over-night coach trade and the discovery and exploitation of a spa.

At this time all the development was concentrated on Newland Street. Chipping Hill was neglected and became something of a backwater. While the timber framed buildings in Newland Street were being given Georgian brick fronts, those in Chipping Hill were left untouched, and many remain with us to-day in almost their original state.

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many of these fine old houses were sub-divided and occupied by labourers, and very little maintenance work was done on them.

By the 1930's and 1940's many of them were badly deteriorating and in danger of becoming derelict. The threat of demolition hung over many of them.

Fortunately most were saved and have been, or are being, fully restored by their new owners. They now stand for us to see, study, and admire, as a living example of a medieval village.

The whole of Chipping Hill is now a conservation area.

Railway Station

The Eastern Counties Railway to Witham and Colchester opened in 1843. The line and station were built in a cutting right through the middle of the Iron-Age hill fort. Originally the booking hall and main entrance were on the opposite side of the track, with a station forecourt approached from Easton Road.

Branch lines to Maldon and Braintree were started shortly after, and were completed by 1850.

In 1905, Witham station was the scene of a horrific rail disaster. The Cromer express train left the rails and ploughed into the station buildings. Eleven people were killed and many more were injured.

Two years later, in 1907, the station was extensively re-built and the booking hall and entrance moved to their present position.

Braintree Road

Braintree Road was built in about 1860 to 1870, soon after the railway line to Braintree was completed, and became the main road from Witham to Cressing and Braintree.

Houses were built in the road, some of them bearing plaques dating them in the 1880's.

Although the road is narrow and built-up, it was perfectly adequate for the mainly horse-drawn traffic of its day, and even for the two-way motor traffic in the 1930's and 1940's. In the post war years, as the number of cars and lorries rapidly increased, the road became very congested and was eventually by-passed.

The Albert Inn

The Albert Inn is named after Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg who became Prince Consort to Queen Victoria in 1840.

The building is much older than that, at least two-to-three hundred years old. Its previous name, if it was then an inn, is unknown.

The effigy standing outside is a teak figure-head from an old East Indian tea clipper. It once stood outside a coffee shop in Bishopsgate. When the shop was demolished to make way for Liverpool Street station to be built, the effigy was brought to Witham.

Until the 1970's he was in good condition and was nicely painted with a blue sarong, red and white sash, and golden crown. Since then he has been allowed to badly deteriorate and in the last couple of years (1990-1992) has lost an arm.

Templemead Court

Templemead Court is a block of flats built in 1988 on the site of Pinkhams Glove Factory; opposite the Albert Inn.

Pinkhams Glove Factory

Pinkhams glove factory (W Pinkham and Son Limited) was founded by William Pinkham, who, as a boy, was an apprentice in a glove factory in Torrington, Devon. In 1884, at the age of 22, he married 20 year old Rebecca Fowler, herself a glove machinist. In 1891 they had a son, Leslie.

About the year 1899 they started their own glove-making business in Devon. In 1901 the family moved to Witham where William was employed as a political agent. In his spare time he continued to make gloves in a house in Albert Road, opposite the railway station. By 1904 he employed several girls and took over two more houses nearby.

In 1912 they built a factory by the railway bridge and founded the National Glove Company Limited. The business thrived until the late 1920's, but then in 1929 subsidised foreign competition from the Continent forced the business to close. However, in the 1930's they were able to re-open and build up to full capacity again. During the 1939-45 war one of their products was special electrically heated gloves for aircrews.

After the war, Leslie's three sons joined the company. In 1948 an additional factory was built on the adjoining site, and other factories built in County Durham. By the 1950's they were producing four thousand dozen pairs of gloves per week for world-wide sale.

In the 1960's cheap imported gloves from the Far East, and the fact that ladies gloves were going out of fashion, caused the company to close down in 1966

The factory buildings stood until the mid-1980's and were then demolished. In 1988, a block of flats known as Templemead Court was built on the site.

Bellfield Road

Before 1970, the main road from the railway bridge curved round to the left, directly to Chipping Hill village.

Traffic travelling to Cressing and Braintree used the narrow part of Braintree Road flanked with houses, near the railway station. With the ever-increasing traffic flow, the road soon became congested.

To ease the traffic flow problem, the main road was re-routed to curve round to the right before approaching Chipping Hill village, and a new road built to join the old Braintree Road further along. In this way the narrow part of Braintree Road was by-passed. The project was completed by 1972.

The new road is called Bellfield Road. It passes over the Bell Fields where the original church bells were cast.

To make way for Bellfield Road, only one house had to be demolished. It was an Edwardian house called The Temples, built in 1902 and demolished in 1969.

No.4 Chipping Hill: The Grange

The Grange is a timber framed and rendered house. It has a Georgian style porch with a triangular pediment supported on columns, added at a later time.

It was once the home of Canon Luard, son of Admiral Sir William Luard. When the Canon retired, he returned to Witham for the rest of his life. He survived to a ripe old age and apparently still drove his car until he was ninety years old.

After Canon Luards death in the 1960's, There was an attempt to demolish the Grange and most of its roof was removed. Fortunately a preservation order was obtained just in time to save it, and the house was then restored.

During the building of Bellfield Road, The Grange lost most of its front garden, including a summer house on the front lawn.

No.6 Chipping Hill: Mill Cottage

Behind The Grange there was once a steam-driven sawmill known as Ramsden Mill. It later became a carpet warehouse.

In about 1860, a Victorian house, Mill Cottage, was built for the mill manager.

Nos. 3 to 33 Chipping Hill: Earlsmead

The present houses in, and adjacent to, Earlsmead were built in about 1965 to 1970 on the site of a large Victorian house called "Earlsmead", demolished in the early 1960's.

The ground on which Earlsmead was built sloped away sharply from front to rear. The house had two storeys at the front, facing the road, and three storeys with a garage and workroom at the rear, facing the river. A "bridge" linked the front porch to the pavement.

The family who lived at Earlsmead, Mr. and Mrs. Last, had a new house built, which they called "Cobblers", further along the road in Chipping Hill village.

Nos. 10 and 12 Chipping Hill: Temple Villas

This pair of elegant Victorian houses, known as Temple Villas, was built in about 1850. Their style retains many Georgian characteristics, notably the decreasing height of windows from the ground floor upwards.

The extension to the side and rear of number ten was added in about 1860, ten years after the house was built. It is thought that it may have originally been a ballroom, and later a billiards room.

Number twelve, called "Chimneys", has been in continuous occupation, and maintained in good condition, since it was built; but number ten, called "Greystones", has changed ownership many times.

Both houses are quite large with three storeys and cellars, obviously intended for well-to-do families, probably with servants.

One such family was a Doctor Charles Milne O.B.E. and his wife. After service in The Royal Medical Corps, rising to the rank of Colonel, Dr. Milne then ran a successful practice in Wales. When he retired in 1932 the family came to live in Witham. In 1935, they moved to No.10 Chipping Hill where they stayed until the Doctor died in 1951.

One of his daughters was Marjorie Milne who also lived here from time to time during that period. Marjorie, a Graduate of Cambridge University, became a Christian Philosopher and soon gained a reputation as a religious writer, teacher, and missionary. She died in 1977, at the age of 70, having devoted the whole of her life to promoting Christian values and unity. A book entitled "Glastonbury Journey" by Brian Frost, relating the story of her life, has recently been published.

Soon after the Milnes left, the house remained unoccupied. By the 1960's it had become derelict and was open from cellar to roof. In the 1970's it was restored and is now occupied again. It has now had solar heating panels installed on the roof.

No.14 Chipping Hill: The Recess

The Recess is much older than it looks. It is a seventeenth century timber-framed building which was given a brick outer shell in the late eighteenth century.

During the last war it was an army billet, and later was used by the council as a hostel for bombed out and homeless families.

It was left in a bad state of repair, but by about 1960 it had been nicely restored by its present owner who bought it in 1955.

No.16 Chipping Hill

Number 16 Chipping Hill was originally a sixteenth century timber-framed lathe and plaster building.

In about 1840, Mary Ann Bramston came to live here and the house became known as "Bramstons". She was the sister of the Reverend John Bramston, vicar of St. Nicolas Church from 1840 until he was appointed Dean of Winchester Cathedral in 1872. Bramston school and sports centre are named after him.

Mary Bramston had the house extensively re-built and enlarged. At the same time its present mock Tudor front and porch were added hiding its true age.

In 1878, the house was bought by the Cullen family who owned it until 1948. Thomas Cullen was one of the countries leading seed growers and merchants who established an international reputation.

In 1984, the house was divided into two separate dwellings, and it is the part in White Horse Lane which is now known as "Bramstons".

White Horse Lane

White Horse Lane was built in the ditch circling the base of the old Saxon fort, and until the late nineteenth century it was called Hill Lane. It originally followed a full semi-circular path to join Avenue Road on the other side of the railway.

The house called "Saddle Lodge", and the adjoining bungalows, were built on what was once the rear garden of Bramstons. The garden extended to Cullens warehouse on the other side of Bellfield Road.

A decorative feature on the wall of Saddle Lodge is an old fire insurance emblem. In the days when the Insurance Companies ran their own fire-fighting services, these plaques were issued to policy holders to display on the walls of their houses. If a house caught fire and it didn't show the correct plaque, then the firemen would ignore it, and let it burn! The number on the emblem is the owners policy number.

Behind the buildings opposite Saddle Lodge is a low wall, once the wall of the coach yard of the White Horse Inn. On the far side of that wall is a stone tablet set into the brickwork, with the inscription;

THIS END
BELONGS TO
J.C. 1845

J.C. was John Coote, an Estate Agent, Cabinet Maker, Upholsterer, Auctioneer, and Undertaker. His family were also local builders and it is thought that they built Temple Villas.

No.35 Chipping Hill: Barnardiston House.

This house is named after Dame Catherine Barnardiston.

The Barnardiston family were Lords of the Manor of Kedington in Suffolk, from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century. Dame Catherine was the second wife of one Sir Thomas Barnardiston, and her effigy can be seen on Sir Thomas's memorial in Kedington church. After Sir Thomas died, Catherine came to Witham and married William Towse, a barrister and judge, who was a tenant at Witham Place.

Dame Catherine Barnardiston founded a charity for poor elderly people of Chipping Hill, and in 1630 she bought "Barnardiston House" as an endowment.

Of the occupiers over the next couple of hundred years very little is known, but then in 1858, Barnardiston House became a boarding school for boys. It was known as "Witham School" and was run by Thomas Morell Blackie.

Crittalls, the metal window manufacturers, later bought the house for the manager of their Witham factory. Francis Henry Crittall, the company's founder, had himself been a pupil here for three years in the 1870's when it was the Witham School.

Since 1984 it has been a nursing home.

Most of what is visible to-day, including the brick front, the Doric porch with fluted columns, and the parapet, are the result of a substantial re-build and modernisation in the eighteenth century. Its facade hides a hotch-potch of structural

alterations and additions going back almost five hundred years to its sixteenth century origins.

The house seems to have originated as a pair of timber-framed and plastered cottages. These were probably combined to form one house during re-building work in 1610. Timbers fitted at that time are carved with the inscription "E.C. ANO.DOM.1610". "E.C." is identified as Edward Crissall, a clothier who lived in the house before it was bought by Dame Catherine Barnardiston.

Moat Farm Chase

Moat Farm Chase is an ancient track leading towards London. It roughly follows the slope of the ramparts of the Saxon burh. At the bottom of the slope the track forded the river.

In the year 1800 the brick foot-bridge was built, only wide enough for walkers, riders, and packhorses. It was not wide enough for carts, which still had to use the ford. The ford was still usable up to about twenty years ago, and was a favourite place for the local children to play.

Moat Farm

About half way down the chase, on the right, "end-on" to the path, once stood the farmhouse of Moat Farm, built in the sixteenth century.

Its name may come from the moat of the Saxon burh near which it is built; or, more likely, may be a corruption of the Saxon "Moot", the meeting place for the council of the Saxon Hundred of Witham.

In 1929, the farmland passed to a farmer who had his house and other lands elsewhere. The farmhouse became redundant and was converted to three cottages. For many years these were without mains water, gas, or electricity. Water was drawn from a well and the cottages were lit by oil lamps.

The cottages were occupied until 1949, but were then condemned as unsuitable for living in, and in the 1950's were demolished.

Barns and out-buildings on the opposite side of the chase were then converted to a modern dwelling, now known as "Moat Farm House".

Modern houses have now been built on the site of the demolished farmhouse.

No.18 Chipping Hill: "The Forge"

In the past, one of the most essential tradesmen in any community was the blacksmith and it is to be expected that the craft has been carried on in Chipping Hill for a thousand years or more. However, it is not known if the smithy has always been on this same site.

Evidence suggests that the present smithy on the corner was built in about 1650. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, soon after the smithy was built, one of the blacksmiths was John Greene, who was accused of counterfeiting coins.

From 1882 to 1956 the forge was run by the Quy family. Before the first world war Whitley Daniel Quy was the smith. In 1917 Frank Jasper Quy took over, soon to be joined by his assistant, Henry Dorking. When Frank Quy retired in 1956, Henry Dorking took over and ran the smithy until 1971.

The present blacksmith is Melvin Baker who started as an assistant to Henry Dorking. No horse-shoeing is done now, Melvin's present work being a mixture of traditional ironwork and modern engineering.

The smithy is actually an extension, built in 1650, to an older medieval hall house, now named "The Forge".

The oldest central bay was the original open hall house, believed to have been built in about 1375. In common with all hall houses, it would have had just one large communal room, open to the roof which was supported by a crown post resting on a tie beam.

There would have been a fire on a hearth in the middle of the floor, the smoke escaping wherever it could. Sometimes a vent was provided, high up in a wall near the ridge, for the smoke to get out.

"The Forge" still has its original crown post, and timbers blackened by the escaping smoke.

The two cross wings were added later, one in about 1425 and one in about 1500. These would have been two-storey buildings, with jettied upper floors, as was always the case with hall houses.

For the less rich, chimneys were a relatively late innovation, due to the high cost of bricks. Chimneys were added to The Forge in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Once the chimneys were built to carry the smoke away, this allowed an intermediate floor to be put in to the central open hall to provide a second storey.

The house remained virtually unchanged for three hundred years but by 1970 it was deteriorating and in a bad state of repair. It was then bought by the Essex County Council and fully restored, the major cost of the work being met from grants. The house was divided into two dwellings, the right hand one being for the new blacksmith, and the left hand one being rented-out to help meet the cost of the renovation.

Nos. 20 and 22 Chipping Hill: Victorian Houses.

At first sight, numbers 20 and 22 Chipping Hill appear to be a pair of typical early Victorian cottages, but looking at the side of the house, and its roof, we see that it is quite clearly a much older timber-framed and plastered building.

It was built as an ale house in 1707 for a man called Daniel Redle, who named it the "New White Horse".

About a hundred years later it was re-named "The Kings Head" by Matthew Palmer.

The Early Victorian red brick front was added in the mid-nineteenth century when it was converted into two separate cottages.

Mole End and Mortimers.

The two houses which are now known as Mole End and Mortimers were once all one house and must then have been the largest in Chipping Hill. Both names are relatively modern and seem to have no historical significance.

Mortimers is the one facing into Chipping Hill, and is number 24. Mole End faces the churchyard and its address is number 3 Church Street.

The building originated as a hall house sometime between 1350 and 1430 and this early part is now shared between Mole End and Mortimers. In 1440 a Chantry was founded by Jennette Childe. It is believed that she endowed the house for maintaining the Chantry, and for providing a Priest to sing a daily mass for her soul.

The Priest may also have lived in the house. Who Jennette Childe was, no one seems to know, and no other record of her seems to exist.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the building was extended at both ends and a large Tudor chimney was built. It was during this period that it was divided into two separate houses and it became known as the Lucas Tenement.

In 1662, the Reverend George Lisle, Vicar of Rivenhall Church, refused to concede to an act of Parliament ordering the use of a new prayer book. For this he was dismissed from his living. He then came to live at Mole End, and, in spite of warnings, continued his unlawful non-conformist preaching from the house. For this he was sentenced to nine months imprisonment in Colchester gaol, and was excommunicated.

A few years, later when the Act of Indulgence was passed, he was granted a licence to preach, and to use his home as a Presbyterian Meeting House.

The Reverend Lisle founded the Independent Church which eventually became the United Reform Church in Witham's Newland Street.

Towards the end of the eighteenth century a further extension with a Regency interior was built on to Mortimers. This was probably done by one of the Stourton family who then owned it. A Regency fireplace put in at the time is still there.

After the last war, Mortimers was occupied by an old lady who became something of a recluse and allowed the house to get into a bad state of repair.

In the nineteenth century Mole End was divided into three separate cottages and over the years was rented out to various tenants. Prior to its recent renovation it had been vacant for fifteen years or more and was virtually derelict.

By the end of the 1960's, both houses had badly deteriorated and had a closing and demolition order over them. They were then bought by different new owners and extensively restored at about the same time.

Restoration of Mole End was done by Keith Moscrop and proved to be a mammoth task. The first stage was the removal of decades of accumulated debris, during which some fourteenth century coins were found. In the re-building, old timbers were used which had been rescued from Freebournes farm barns in Newland Street, when they were demolished. Many of Mole End's timbers could be preserved, including an original crown post supporting the roof.

In 1969, Mortimers was bought by a Reverend Lister who was a descendent of Lord Joseph Lister, the surgeon who first discovered and applied antiseptic surgery. He owned it for only about two years and in that time he carried out much of the structural restoration.

William Barbone bought it in 1971 and it was he who, over the next ten years or so, carried out all the internal restoration work.

From the back of the houses in Church Street we can get some idea of their size. The original large house must have been a building of some importance, and may well have been a Wool Market.

St. Nicolas Parish Church

The beginning of the fourteenth century was a prosperous time for England, due mainly to the developing wool trade. Using some of this new wealth, many churches were improved, enlarged, or demolished and completely re-built. Often parts of an older church were incorporated into the new church.

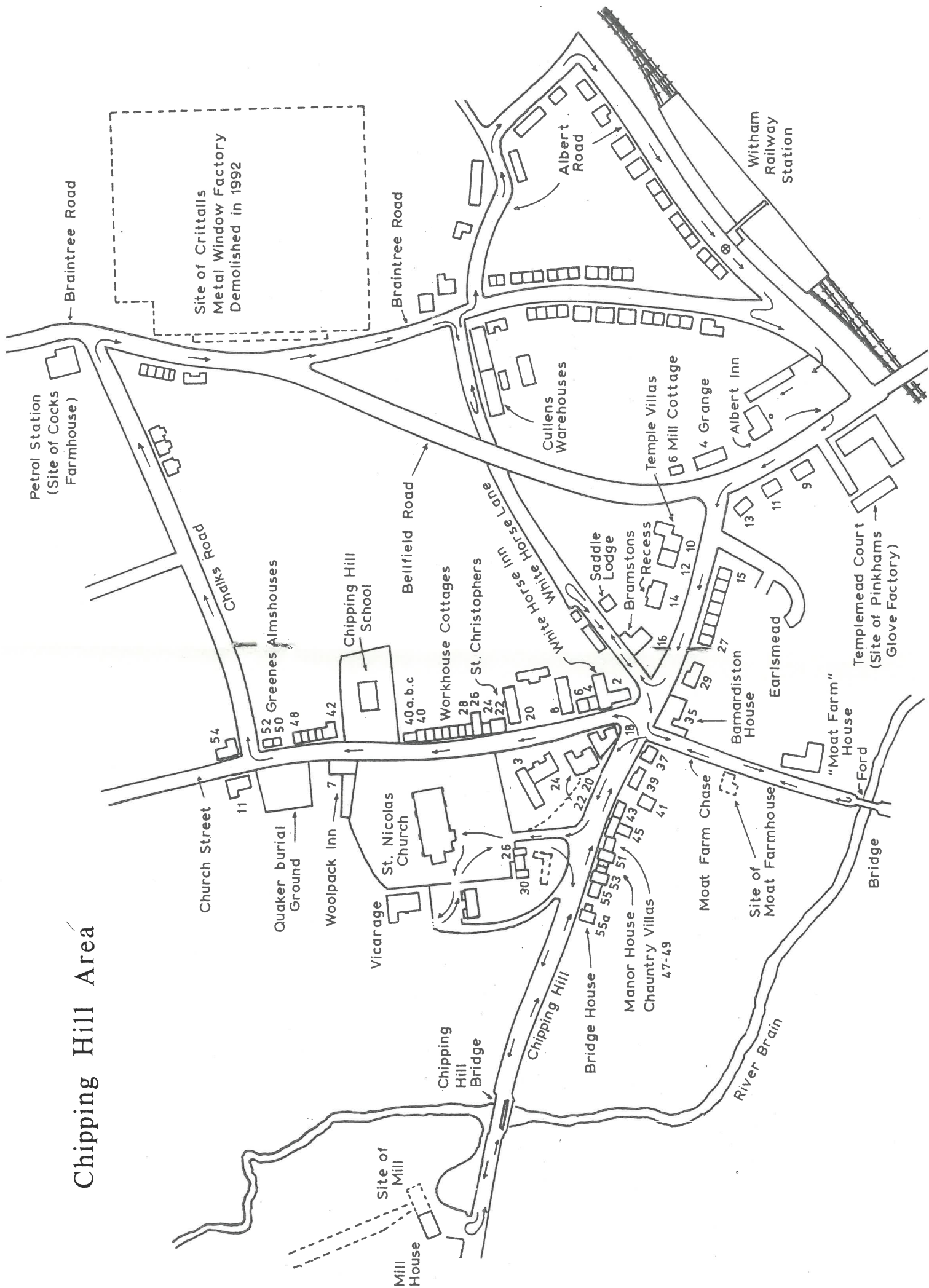
It is to be expected that there was an earlier church on the site of the present Parish Church of St. Nicolas. It could originally have been a Saxon church and may at one time have been a wooden structure. Later it may have been replaced by an Early English church. No reliable records remain.

The present St. Nicolas was built in the decorated Gothic style, the main structural materials being flints, stones, and rubble, interspersed with some Roman bricks and tiles. Its major parts, the nave, the chancel, the north and south aisles, and a tower, were completed in about the 1330's. The walls of the tower are nearly four feet thick. The oldest part is the stone arch of the south door, which is thought to have come from an earlier church.

The first addition to the church was the vestry, built in about 1380. Its outer walls are made of blocks of ragstone, contrasting with the flintwork of the rest of the church.

The south porch is about the same age as the vestry, late fourteenth century. It was built to give protection and dignity to the main entrance.

Chipping Hill Area



The south chapel was the next addition. It was built soon after 1444, probably as the Jennette Childre chantry chapel.

The north chapel appears to have been built soon after the south chapel. It fills-in the gap left between the north aisle and the vestry. The church was then complete.

With one exception, no major changes have been made to the outside appearance of the church since the side chapels were completed. The church looks much the same as it did five hundred years ago. That one exception is the tower.

Originally the masonry part of the tower was squat, and was surmounted by a wooden belfry. The belfry decayed, and in 1743 it was replaced by a red brick upper extension to the tower, making it fourteen feet higher than it is now.

This height spoilt the proportions of the church and the red brick conflicted with the flintwork.

In 1877, during major restoration work, the brick top of the tower was removed and the parapet re-built as it is to-day. The bells were then hung in the chamber below. Ten years later, in 1887, the clock was added. It was donated by Mary Bramston on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

[For more detailed information on St. Nicolas Church. interior and exterior, refer to the excellent guide booklet written by Tom Henderson]

The Vicarage.

The Vicarage was a late seventeenth or early eighteenth century timber framed house, built by the Vicar Jones Warley who was also Archdeacon of Colchester. It is believed to have originally been much larger and reputed to have had twenty-one rooms.

Later in the eighteenth century it was encased in brick and given its Georgian facade. By the late 1930's there was no longer a need for such a large vicarage which would be expensive to maintain, so it was further reduced in size.

It remained as the Vicarage until 1974, and was then sold as a private house and modernised. The stables were converted to a church hall in 1972.

The Village Green.

The name "Chipping" comes from the Saxon word for a market, and it was here on the village green of Chipping Hill that the market was held.

The first known market charter was granted by King Stephen in 1147, and weekly markets continued to be held here for the next three hundred years, up until the fifteenth century.

There is not a lot of room for a market on the present green, but the green would originally have been much larger. It would have been a triangular piece of land extending to Church Street, before Mole End and other houses were built.

Nos. 26 to 30 Chipping Hill: "Green Cottages"

Facing onto the Green is another of Chipping Hill's timber framed houses, this one built in about 1450. For at least a hundred years it has been divided into three cottages.

Its shape has all the characteristics of a hall house with two cross wings.

The left hand cross wing still has its jettied upper storey. The right hand wing projects further forward than the left hand wing, and has a partially hipped roof to the front. There can be little doubt that at some time in the past the whole wing has been extended forward.

In recent years, all three cottages became vacant and have fallen into disrepair. The building has now been bought and is being renovated and converted back to a single house.

In front of the existing cottages on the green, there once stood another row of cottages. These were demolished in 1934 or 1935.

Chipping Hill Bridge

The brick bridge over the river Brain was built in about 1780, replacing an earlier wooden footbridge and a ford. It is said that two brick-layers completed it in only two weeks.

Two hundred years ago the builders could not have envisaged the coming of the motor car and the needs of modern traffic. Its narrow width allows for only single line crossing, one way at a time, and would be dangerous for pedestrians. So, after more than two centuries, it is back to a wooden footbridge for pedestrians, erected in the 1970's along-side the brick bridge.

The danger of walking on the road across the bridge affords some protection to a delicate bit of our history. In 1915, Privates F V Edwards and P Baylis were Range Wardens in the Warwickshire Regiment, billeted in Witham on their way to France. They carved graffiti on a coping stone of the bridge, using an army knife. It gives their names and regiment within a shield.

One wonders if they survived the war, or if this is perhaps their last memorial.

Mill House

The Mill House, the wheel pit, and a bridge over the mill race, are all that now remain of the Chipping Hill water mill.

The weather-boarded mill, which stood to the right of the mill house, was first burnt down in 1775. It was then re-built and had a steam engine installed to supplement the water power. Steam and water power each drove two mill-stones.

The Victorian mill house was built in 1856, joining-on to the mill.

In 1882, fire broke out again, thought to have been started during the night by sparks from the furnace, and the mill was finally destroyed.

The mill house survived the fire and continued to be lived in. It was later extended over part of the mill site. Until the 1940's it was owned by the Bretnall family who's ancestors had previously owned and worked the mill.

From 1988 to 1992 the house remained empty. In those four years it was completely vandalised, practically everything inside was destroyed, and the house left derelict.

It has now been bought and the long process of restoration by the new owners is well under way.

Nos. 51 and 53 Chipping Hill: "Manor House"

This building, with the two cross wings and the dormer window in the roof between them, is known as the "Manor House." It is also traditionally referred to as the Knights Templar's Guest House, but it can have had little to do with the Knights Templar as it was not built until the late fifteenth century, over 150 years after the Order was suppressed.

It is, of course, another hall house. Sometime in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century it had chimneys put in, and an intermediate floor fitted to make an upper room. When this was done to hall houses with low eaves, some method of letting light into the roof space had to be found. This led to the invention of dormer windows, and accounts for the one in the Manor House.

Both cross wings of the Manor House would originally have been jettied, but the left hand one has since been under-built. This was often done to jettied buildings to give more living space inside.

Other alterations were carried out in the eighteenth century, including the installation of the three ground floor bay windows. This, unfortunately, has destroyed the original symmetry of the building.

Just to the right of the door can be seen some exposed brickwork. It is thought that this could have been some sort of shrine dating from the early sixteenth century, and may have had a religious statue in the alcove.

The plaque below tells us that it was repaired by Edward Mazurek in 1966, when working for Richards builders.

There has long been a belief that there was a tunnel running from the cellars of the Manor House, under the village green, to the Church. Although some indication of this has come to light, no conclusive evidence has yet been found.

No.55 Chipping Hill: Manor House Extension

Number 55 Chipping Hill is a later extension to the Manor House. Inside it has wall paintings, one of which is dated 1606, so it must have been built before that date. Its shop front is eighteenth century.

James Abbott, a shoemaker, occupied the house and shop in the 1870's and 1880's. It was the Abbott family who started the Kaye Shoe business. James Abbott also ran a dairy employing five men. After his death, his niece Mary Tyrrell took over both businesses, and sold jugs of milk through a trap-door from the basement.

After the last war, Charlie Rallings moved into the shop, as a shoe repairer, and stayed there until his death in 1971.

No.55a Chipping Hill: Bridge House

Bridge House was built in 1980. It is in a sympathetic style and blends in tastefully with its neighbour built five hundred years earlier.

Apparently it was called Bridge House, not, as one might think, because it over-looks the bridge, but because its first owners were enthusiastic bridge players!

It was built on a site where a tithe barn once stood. The barn was demolished in 1928 and the site then remained empty for the next fifty years.

Nos. 47 and 49 Chipping Hill: Chauntry Villas

Sandwiched between two older buildings are a pair of Victorian red brick houses called "Chauntry Villas." A plaque between the upper windows tells us that they were built in 1897, nearly one hundred years ago. They are about four hundred years "younger" than their neighbours.

Nos. 43 and 45 Chipping Hill: Old Post Office

These two timber framed and white plastered houses, numbers 43 and 45 Chipping Hill, are known as "The Old House" and "The Old Post Office" respectively. Although at first sight they may appear to be all one building, they are in fact quite different in age.

The "Old Post Office" with the large gable facing the street, and the dormer window to its right, is the older part, built in the fifteenth or early sixteenth century. Until the late nineteenth century it was a much longer building, extending further to the right, but this right hand end was then demolished for Chauntry Villas to be built.

The double shop front under the jettied gable was added in the nineteenth century, and was the local Post Office and general store. From the 1890's to the 1940's it was run by the Doole family, first Mrs. Caroline Jane Doole, and then Frank Doole. It was then taken over by Mr. Boyce until its closure in the 1950's.

The "Old House" was built-on in the mid-seventeenth century. By this time, hall houses had had their day, and this is built with a continuous jetty running the length of the building.

Both buildings have now been completely restored as a pair of private houses. Although the "Old Post Office" is no longer a shop, its shop front has been retained in the restoration.

A nice touch is the bit of pargetting, high up on the end wall, reviving a form of decoration popular in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

No.41 Chipping Hill: Littlefields

The house known as Littlefields, set back from the road, was built in the late seventeenth century. It is of timber frame and weatherboarded construction, but the weather boarding was rendered-over in about 1930.

It has a modern extension to the rear.

No.39 Chipping Hill: Cobblers

Cobblers is a modern house built in 1967 on the site where another medieval hall house once stood. It was built for a Mr. and Mrs. Last who moved from Earlsmead further up the road. They called it "Cobblers" as a play on their name, Last.

The earlier hall house had one of its wings converted to a shop, which during the 1920's and 1930's was John Baron's sweet shop. John Baron closed down in 1936 and the building was demolished soon after.

No.37 Chipping Hill: Oaklands

Oaklands is a large and impressive Victorian house which the plaque inside the brick arch over the window dates as 1880.

It was built on what was then a vacant site at the top end of Moat Farm Chase. It may have been the site of a house called Chequers, perhaps an inn, which was demolished in about 1720.

Church Street

Until the mid-1800's, Church Street was the main road from Witham to Cressing and Braintree. At that time the present-day Braintree Road and Cressing Road did not exist. All the horse traffic from Witham came through the middle of Chipping Hill village and up Church Street.

Church Street is almost opposite Moat Farm Chase and may once have been a continuation of the ancient track from London.

No.2 Church Street: The White Horse Inn

In the days when Church Street was a main thoroughfare, the White Horse Inn, strategically placed on the corner, provided accommodation for travellers.

It is a late sixteenth century building, much renovated over the last three hundred years, the most recent renovation being in 1985.

Nos. 4 and 6 Church Street

These two houses with little triangular hoods over the doors, numbers 4 and 6 Church Street, are about the same age as the White Horse, and in fact were once part of the Inn.

Nos. 8 to 20 Church Street: Modern Shops

In the 1960's, a row of old shops and houses was demolished and a "square" of modern shops built. Although built in the 1960's, they are in a style reminiscent of the 1930's London suburban development.

Amongst the old shops demolished were Fuller's Butchers, Alderton's Newsagents, and Lawrences Fried Fish Shop.

No.3 Chipping Hill: Rear of Mortimers

From the square of modern shops in Church Street, the rear of Mortimers and Mole End can be seen over the wall.

The large size of these two houses, with their cross wings extending to the rear, emphasises their importance in earlier days.

No. 22 Church Street: "St. Christophers"

In the late eighteenth century, this brick house was built as a Church of England infants school known as St. Christophers. There is evidence to suggest that it was supported by a charity founded some 150 years earlier by Dame Catherine Barnardiston, after whom Barnardiston House is named.

Apparently, in the year 1900 it was declared unfit for use, and the school was closed.

In spite of its bad state of repair, it continued to be used for various purposes. For example, from 1914 to 1927 it was a furniture dealers, Alfred and Ellen Phillips.

For a short time during the last war it was a British Restaurant. After the war it was used for Sunday School meetings, and at that time it was in such a bad state that one could see through the holes in the floor from the upstairs rooms to the ground floor.

Later, it was used as a store by a furniture removal business, getting more and more dilapidated.

It has now been nicely restored as a private house.

Nos. 28 to 40 Church Street: Workhouse Cottages

This row of cottages was originally the Parish workhouse, also known as the Union House. From the Pargetting on the wall we see that it was built in 1714.

It ceased to be used as a workhouse in 1839 when a new workhouse was built in Hatfield Road, Witham. This new workhouse is now the Bridge Hospital. The old workhouse here in Church Street was then converted into a row of seven cottages.

Even to-day it retains a long workroom extending the whole length of the building on the unused and unoccupied second floor, under the roof.

Nos. 24 and 26 Church Street

This pair of houses were once a fifteenth century hall house, later divided into two cottages. The one with the dormer window was the central hall. The other, with the jettied gable was the left hand cross wing.

The right hand cross wing must have been demolished in the late eighteenth century for the Church of England school to be built in its place.

Both houses were used as part of the workhouse, possibly as a dwelling for the Master and his family.

Nos. 40a, 40b and 40c Church Street

At the left hand end of the workhouse cottages there was once a brick cart shed.

This was demolished in about 1980 and the present block of three single storey cottages built in its place. The new building retains a similar appearance to the old cart shed. Old bricks have been used in its construction, perhaps salvaged from the old cart shed.

The Board School

The Board School in Church Street, now called the Chipping Hill Infants School, was built in 1902, just about the time that the Church School further down the street was closed down.

It is built in a shallow depression which was once a gravel pit. Material for building St. Nicolas Parish Church was quarried here.

Nos. 42 to 48 Church Street

Here are four cottages built in about 1700.

The nineteenth century was the time when many houses were converted to shops, and this was done to the two cottages at the left hand end of the block. Frederick Hasler ran it as a grocery and general store from 1910 to about 1930. William Pendle then took over the business and remained until well after the last war when he retired.

Since then it has had a number of owners before finally closing down in about 1989 and remaining empty.

The shop has now been converted back to its original use as a pair of cottages, matching those on its right.

No.50 Church Street: Greenes Almshouses

In 1491, Thomas Greene founded these two almshouses for four poor widows of Chipping Hill and gave a farm in Springfield, called Brownes Farm, for their support.

The present cottages are not the originals of course, these were re-built in the 1860's.

No.7 Church Street: The Woolpack Inn

The Woolpack Inn is a seventeenth century timber framed and plastered building which was extended and re-fronted in brick during the eighteenth century. It originally had extensive stabling at the rear. It is said to be one of the oldest houses in Witham with the least alteration of any of the inns.

The well, which has now been filled in, had an archway part way down on the side facing the church which may have given access to a secret passage.

The inn was used by wool traders who brought their produce to the Chipping Hill wool market. It was carried in "Woolpacks" on the backs of pack-horses, often from as far afield as the North of England.

After the decline of the wool trade, part of the stable block was converted to a bakery, and continued to be used as such for much of the nineteenth century. The landlord then combined the two trades of Innkeeper and Baker.

For over fifty years, until her retirement a few years ago, it was run by Honor De'Ath.

The Board School

The Board School in Church Street, now called the Chipping Hill Infants School, was built in 1902, just about the time that the Church School further down the street was closed down.

It is built in a shallow depression which was once a gravel pit. Material for building St. Nicolas Parish Church was quarried here.

Nos. 42 to 48 Church Street

Here are four cottages built in about 1700.

The nineteenth century was the time when many houses were converted to shops, and this was done to the two cottages at the left hand end of the block. Frederick Hasler ran it as a grocery and general store from 1910 to about 1930. William Pendle then took over the business and remained until well after the last war when he retired.

Since then it has had a number of owners before finally closing down in about 1989 and remaining empty.

The shop has now been converted back to its original use as a pair of cottages, matching those on its right.

No.50 Church Street: Greenes Almshouses

In 1491, Thomas Greene founded these two almshouses for four poor widows of Chipping Hill and gave a farm in Springfield, called Brownes Farm, for their support.

The present cottages are not the originals of course, these were re-built in the 1860's.

No.7 Church Street: The Woolpack Inn

The Woolpack Inn is a seventeenth century, timber framed and plastered building which was extended and re-fronted in brick during the eighteenth century. It originally had extensive stabling at the rear. It is said to be one of the oldest houses in Witham with the least alteration of any of the inns.

The well, which has now been filled in, had an archway part way down on the side facing the church which may have given access to a secret passage.

The inn was used by wool traders who brought their produce to the Chipping Hill wool market. It was carried in "Woolpacks" on the backs of pack-horses, often from as far afield as the North of England.

After the decline of the wool trade, part of the stable block was converted to a bakery, and continued to be used as such for much of the nineteenth century. The landlord then combined the two trades of Innkeeper and Baker.

For over fifty years, until her retirement a few years ago, it was run by Honor De'Ath.

No.11 Church Street

During the eighteenth century, the hay-day of Georgian building, all the development was concentrated on Witham's Newland Street. Chipping Hill was neglected. That is why we have so far seen no genuine Georgian houses here.

The one and only example in Chipping Hill is this elegant house in Church Street, built in the early part of the eighteenth century.

Part of the garden to the left of the house was once a Quaker burial ground.

No.54 Church Street

This is a typical "corner shop", converted from a house in the nineteenth century. At the turn of the century it was a grocery and general store run by the Hasler family, before Frederick Hasler opened his other shop further down the road.

Although it has been a private house for over eighty years, it still has not been re-converted to its original form.

Chalks Road and Cocks Farm

Chalks Road leads through from Church Street to Braintree Road.

Until the early 1930's, the land to the left, where St. Nicolas Road now is, was farm land, known as "Cocks Farm". From 1890 until about 1929 it was worked by James Brown and his family, who used to supply local people with milk.

The farmhouse stood at the corner of Chalks Road and Braintree Road, where the petrol filling station now is, and was still there until well into the 1930's

Site of Crittalls Factory

The first Witham factory of Crittalls, the metal window manufacturers, once stood here in Braintree Road, almost opposite the end of Chalks Road. At the present time (1992) the site has been cleared and its future use is undecided.

By 1886, the Company founder, Francis Henry Crittall, had taken over his fathers ironmongery shop in Braintree. He expanded the manufacturing side of the business and started making metal window-frames. Three years later, this aspect of the business became so important that he set up a new company, The Crittall Manufacturing Company Limited, exclusively to manufacture window frames.

Another of the Company's interests was steel office furniture, and in 1919 the Braintree Road factory in Witham was built for its manufacture. At that time, the factory was one of the most modern in the Country. One year later the steel furniture business was sold to Sankey Sheldon and the Witham factory turned over to window frame production.

During the 1920's and 1930's, production at both Witham and Braintree continued to increase and Crittalls became the worlds largest manufacturer of metal window-frames. An important innovation introduced at the Witham factory was hot-dip galvanising. Valentine Crittall, son of the Company's founder became Managing Director, and in 1931 was knighted for his services to Engineering.

In the 1939-45 war, all the Crittall factories were turned over to war work of many kinds, from armaments to Bailey bridges.

After the war, production soon returned to window frames and the Witham factory was completely re-equipped for even greater capacity. Many new and improved designs were introduced.

In 1947, Sir Valentine Crittall was further honoured by being elevated to the Peerage, taking the name Lord Braintree. He died in 1961 at the age of 77. During his lifetime he had been responsible for some of the greatest advances in Engineering, Company Management, Industrial Relations, and Employees Welfare. One of his finest achievements was the creation of a garden village for his workers in nearby Silver End.

From the mid-1960's, a series of mergers and take-overs took place. In 1974, this culminated in The Crittall Company being taken over by Norcross Limited, large scale manufacturers and suppliers to the building industry, and being renamed "Crittall Windows".

In 1990 a complete new factory was built in Braintree to handle all window production. It was opened on the 22nd August of that year by the then prime minister, Margaret Thatcher. All work was transferred from Witham to the new factory and, after seventy years of making window frames, Witham's Braintree Road factory was closed down.

By the end of 1992 all the factory buildings had been demolished and the entire site cleared. Crittalls seventy-year association with Witham had ended.

Thomas Cullen and Sons Limited

The large warehouses in White Horse Lane, between Braintree Road and Bellfield Road, were once the premises of Thomas Cullen and Sons Limited, Wholesale Seed Merchants.

In 1894, after thirty years in the wholesale seed trade, Thomas Cullen set up his own seed business here in Chipping Hill, shortly to be joined by his son Frank. Over the following few decades his firm was to become one of the Country's leading seed suppliers with world-wide sales.

The Cullen's first warehouse was timber framed and weatherboarded. On its three floors it could store six hundred tons of seed, produced from his hundreds of acres of land.

In the 1920's, soon after the first world war, the Company was expanding and a second large warehouse was required. This one was built of brick, along-side the first.

The founder, Thomas Cullen, died in 1935 at the age of 89, at his home, Bramstons. Frank Cullen then ran the firm until after the second world war, when he then retired at the age of 69.

The last of the Cullen family to run the firm was Anthony Cullen, Grandson of the founder. By the 1970's, small family seed businesses could not survive, and in 1974 Thomas Cullen and Son Limited, of Witham, joined a large group, Amalgamated Seed Merchants Limited of Leicester.

In 1983 the Witham-based Company transferred its business to Leicester, and the premises here in Chipping Hill closed down.

The complex of buildings has now been restored and split into a number of units known as the Templars Business Centre, where a variety of small businesses are carried on.

Cullen's office building is now the Brookend Veterinary Surgeons and the large weather-boarded warehouse is used by the Essex Probation Service.

The brick warehouse has now become the Witham Technology Centre, a training establishment funded jointly by Braintree District Council and the Government. They now teach Information Technology and Business Administration.

In the renovation, Cullen's old hoist has been preserved as a reminder of an earlier technology.

Albert Road

To return to the Railway Station, take Albert Road, opposite Cullen's warehouse. On reaching the railway line the road takes a sharp right hand turn. Up to this point it was originally part of Hill Lane, now known as White Horse Lane, before the railway was made and Braintree Road was built. It then continued in a semi-circle, following the contour of the Saxon burh, to join Avenue Road.

Turning the corner, the houses on the right, opposite the railway line, are all Victorian. It was in one of these houses that William Pinkham started making gloves, before he had his factory built.